

Handling bank counters and parcel services

French A2 (elementary) · Lesson

Quick answer: To handle the bank and the post office in French, use polite set phrases: Je voudrais or Pouvez-vous followed by an infinitive, such as Je voudrais ouvrir un compte. Learn the key nouns, like un colis, une carte bancaire and une lettre recommandée, and bring une pièce d'identité.

Level: French A2 (CEFR elementary) · **Standards:** CEFR A2, Spoken interaction

How do you ask politely at a bank or post office?

At a counter, French uses a fixed polite formula, not a bare order. Greet first with Bonjour, then use Je voudrais (I would like) or Pouvez-vous (can you) followed by an infinitive.

Pattern	Meaning	Example
Je voudrais + infinitive	I would like to...	Je voudrais ouvrir un compte.
Pouvez-vous + infinitive ?	Can you...?	Pouvez-vous peser ce colis ?
Je dois + infinitive	I have to...	Je dois envoyer une lettre.
Il faut + infinitive	One must...	Il faut montrer une pièce d'identité.

Rule: vouloir, pouvoir, devoir

These three verbs are followed by a verb in the infinitive, which never changes. In the negative, {ne ... pas} surrounds the first verb only: {Je ne peux pas payer par chèque.}

	vouloir	pouvoir	devoir
je	veux	peux	dois
nous	voulons	pouvons	devons
vous	voulez	pouvez	devez
ils	veulent	peuvent	doivent

Watch out

{Je veux un timbre} sounds like an order. Say {Je voudrais un timbre, s'il vous plaît.} Also, {un colis} is masculine, so write {un colis}, never {une colis}.

Which words do you need at the bank?

French	English
un compte courant	checking account
une carte bancaire	bank card
un virement	transfer
un retrait	withdrawal
un distributeur	ATM
un RIB	bank account details
un justificatif de domicile	proof of address
une pièce d'identité	ID document



A bank card and the words you need to read it.

A short dialogue

{ — Bonjour, je voudrais ouvrir un compte courant. }

{ — Bien sûr. Vous avez une pièce d'identité et un justificatif de domicile ? }

{ — Oui, voici mon passeport et ma facture d'électricité. }

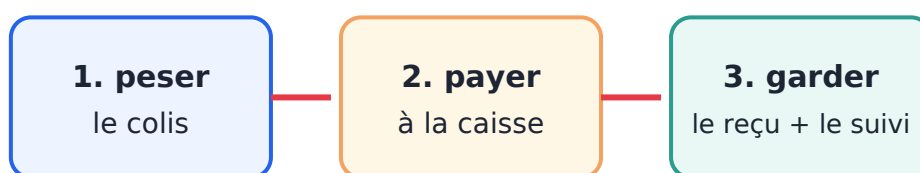
— Hello, I would like to open a checking account. — Of course. Do you have an ID and proof of address? — Yes, here are my passport and my electricity bill.

How do you send a parcel or a registered letter?

French	English
un colis	parcel
un timbre	stamp

French	English
le guichet	counter window
le suivi	tracking
une lettre recommandée	registered letter
l'accusé de réception	proof of delivery

Useful sentences: Je voudrais envoyer ce colis à Lausanne. — I would like to send this parcel to Lausanne. Il pèse deux kilos. — It weighs two kilos. Je voudrais une lettre recommandée avec accusé de réception.



The three steps of sending a parcel at the counter.

Culture note

In France, a registered letter with proof of delivery has legal value. People use it to end a lease, cancel a contract or resign from a job. The sender receives a receipt, then a card signed by the recipient.

Zoé's tip

Open with {Bonjour} and close with {Merci, bonne journée !} Between the two, one polite request is enough. A calm tone matters more than perfect grammar.

Key points to remember

- Je voudrais + infinitive is the polite way to ask for a service.
- Vouloir, pouvoir and devoir are followed by an infinitive.
- To open an account you usually need une pièce d'identité and un justificatif de domicile.
- Un colis is masculine; une lettre recommandée is feminine.

Handling Bank Counters and Parcel Services: frequently asked questions

How do you say "I would like to open an account" in French?

Say Je voudrais ouvrir un compte. Add courant for a checking account. Je voudrais is more polite than Je veux, which sounds like an order.

What documents do you need to open a bank account in France?

Banks usually ask for une pièce d'identité and un justificatif de domicile, such as a recent utility bill. Some also ask for proof of income. A useful question is Quels documents faut-il apporter ?

What is a lettre recommandée?

It is a registered letter. With un accusé de réception, the sender gets proof that the recipient received it. It is common for official procedures such as ending a lease.

How do you ask someone to weigh a parcel?

Say Pouvez-vous peser ce colis, s'il vous plaît ? To give the weight, say Il pèse deux kilos.

How do you say "I have to send a letter"?

Use devoir + infinitive: Je dois envoyer une lettre. For a general rule, use il faut: Il faut un timbre.